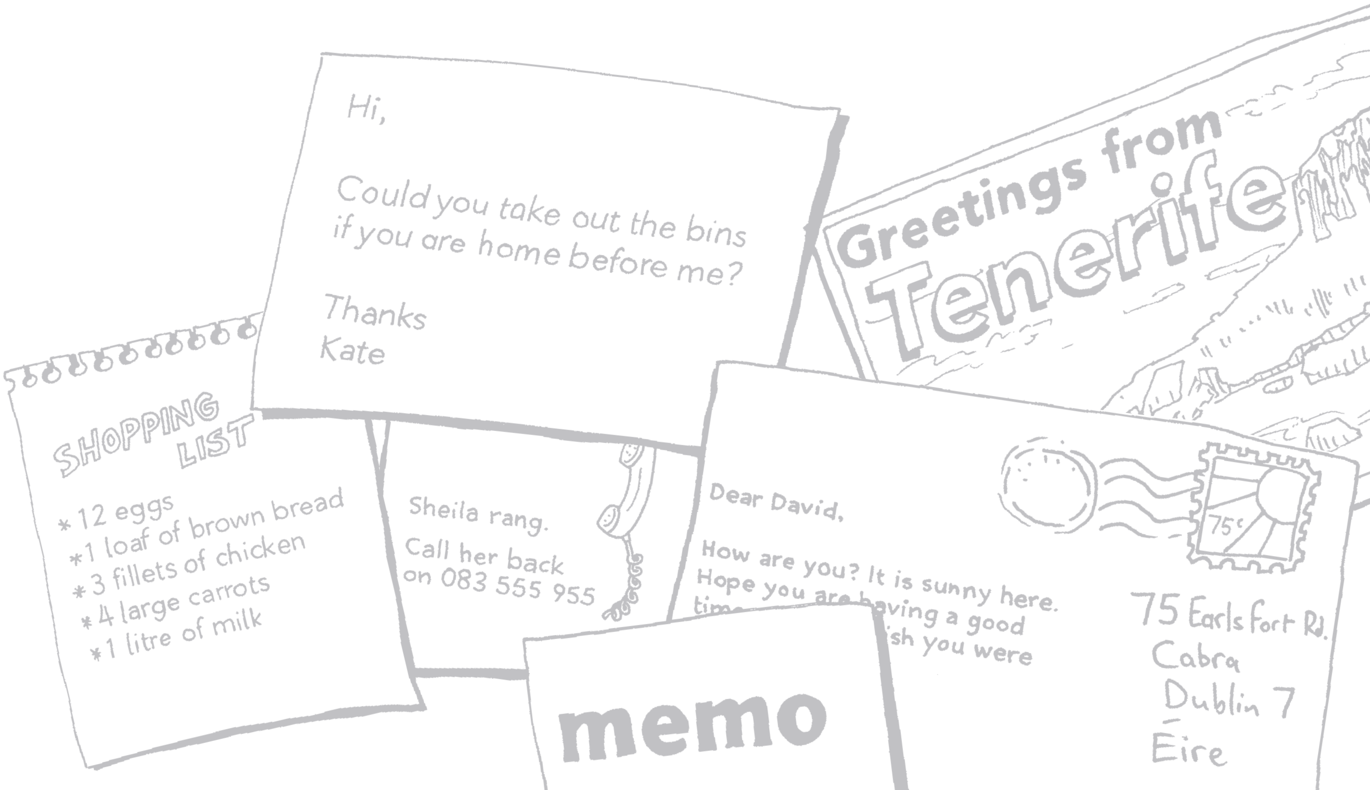
NALA

National Adult Literacy Agency

Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Better handwriting for adults



Written by: Meliosa Bracken and Pam Buchanan

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We wish to thank all of the people who contributed to this magazine, especially those who generously shared their handwriting with us.

Contents

This magazine is divided into three sections.

Welcome

These days we don't need to write by hand as much as we did in the past. Instead, we can type a letter on our computer, or send an email or text.

But sometimes we do need to write.

Our writing changes as we grow and we develop our own style. We have written this magazine for adults who would like to improve their handwriting, adults who don't write often or are unhappy with the way their handwriting looks.

We hope that you find our tips and ideas useful, and that you will soon be comfortable with your handwriting, whatever your style!



Section 1
Getting ready for writing



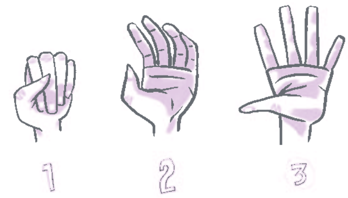
6

Warming up

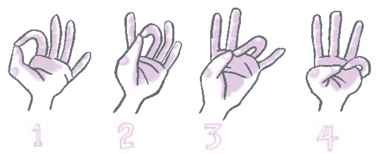
When you write, you use muscles in your hand, wrist and shoulder. If you don't write very often, your hand might cramp or get tired easily. Spending a couple of minutes doing the following warm-up exercises will help the muscles in your hand get stronger and more flexible.



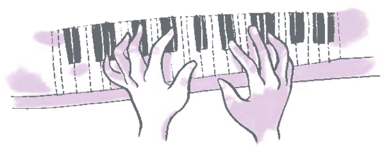
Stretch and wriggle your fingers for a few seconds.



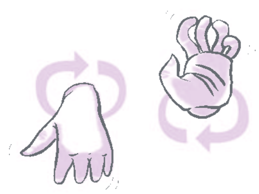
Make a fist and then stretch out your hand.



Touch each finger to your thumb. Try it to your favourite tune!



Play an imaginary piano on the table.



Move your wrists in a circle.



Roll your shoulders forward and back

Warming up

Are you sitting comfortably?

Before you write, ask yourself...

- Do I have a table/hard surface to write on?
- Can I rest my hands easily on the table/surface?
- Are my arms and shoulders relaxed?
- Can I place my feet flat on the floor?
- Is my chair comfortable?
- Am I in a quiet place?
- Do I have enough light?
- Do I have enough space?
- How much time do I have?

TIP: If you're doing a long piece of writing, give your hand a rest from time to time.

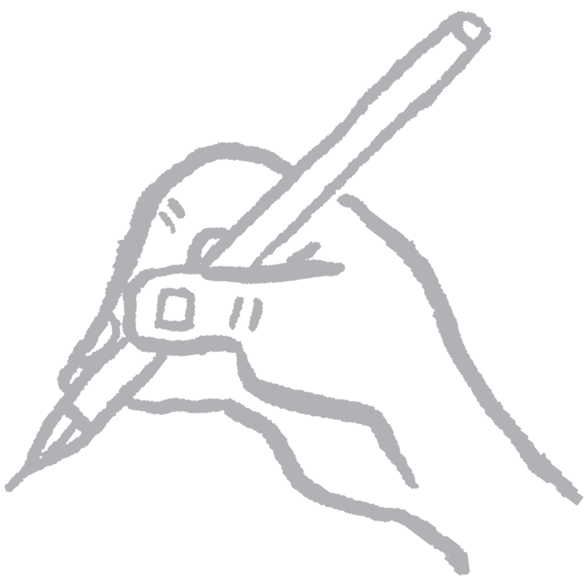


New words

Some of the words used in this magazine might be new to you.

The table below gives the meaning of some words that you will come across.

Capital letters	The large letters in the alphabet also known as uppercase. For example 'capital A'.
Descenders	Five letters of the alphabet that have tails that dip below the line. The five letters are: g y p q and j
Doodle	A simple drawing, using shapes or pictures.
Grip	How you hold your pen or pencil between your fingers and thumbs.
Letter formation	Means how letters are shaped. If letters are formed properly they are neat and easy to read.
Pangram	A sentence that contains all the letters of the alphabet.
Style	The individual way each person writes.
Small letters	Also known as lowercase, for example 'small a'.



Choosing a pen

Have you ever heard the saying 'Always use the right tool for the job'?

Think of your pen as your handwriting tool. The right pen can help avoid smudging and make your writing look smarter. It can also prevent hand strain. Picking the right one for you can be tricky because there are so many different types. Here are some tips to help you.

There are three things to think about when choosing the right pen:

1. The type of ink it uses;
2. The size and shape of the pen; and
3. The type of point it has.

1. Pens that use different types of ink



Ball-point pens or biros are the most popular and use oil-based ink.

- They are cheap, easy to get, quick to dry and they don't smudge.
- The ink does not flow very smoothly and they can be hard to grip because they are often made from smooth plastic.



Rollerball pens use water-based ink and write more thickly than ball-point pens.

- Rollerball ink flows very smoothly and could help you to write faster.
- The ink doesn't dry quickly so it can smudge.



Gel ink pens are new and very popular because they can come in lots of different colours including glitter shades!

- They are smooth and free flowing like rollerball pens but they dry quickly and don't smudge like ball point pens.
- They are more expensive and sometimes the flow of ink can stop and start for no reason.

Choosing a pen

2. Size and Shape

Pens come in all shapes and sizes and you might have to try out a few before you find the one you like.

Ask yourself:

- Is it short or long, thick or thin?
- Does it have a cushioned grip?
- Is it smooth to the touch or bumpy?
- Is it heavy or light?

A pen with a thick barrel or a cushioned grip is easier to hold and can be more comfortable to write with. Shiny or very slim pens can be slippery to hold and could cause your hand muscles to strain.

Tip: Pencil grips can also be used on pens to improve grip – they can be bought separately and you can slip one onto the pen you are using. They are made from soft spongy material and are very good if you get hand cramp easily or if your hand sweats when you have to write a lot.

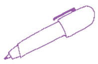
Choosing a pen

3. Pen points

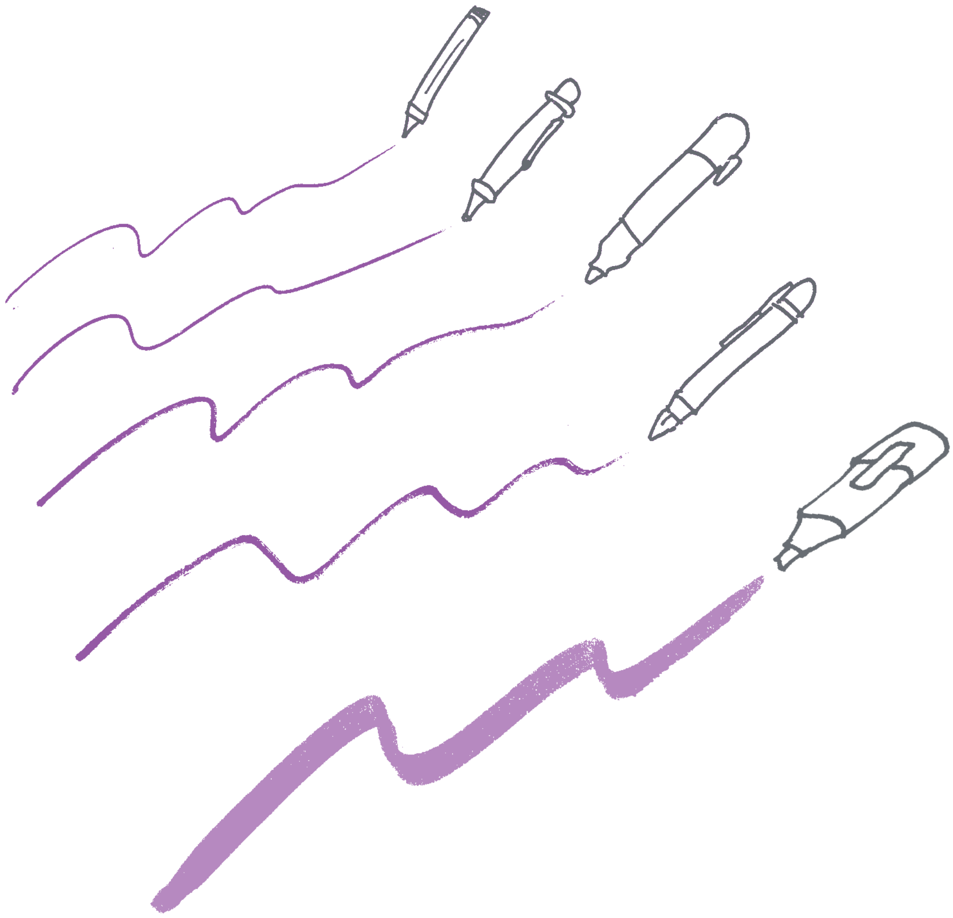
Pens have different points or nibs – fine, extra fine, medium, and bold point.

Fine points write thin lines, and medium and bold points write thicker lines.

Pens that write thickly may be smoother to write with and fine nib pens may help you write more neatly.



Tip: Try out different nib types and see which ones you like best.



How to hold your pen

Hold your pen firmly, but without squeezing, between fingers and thumb.



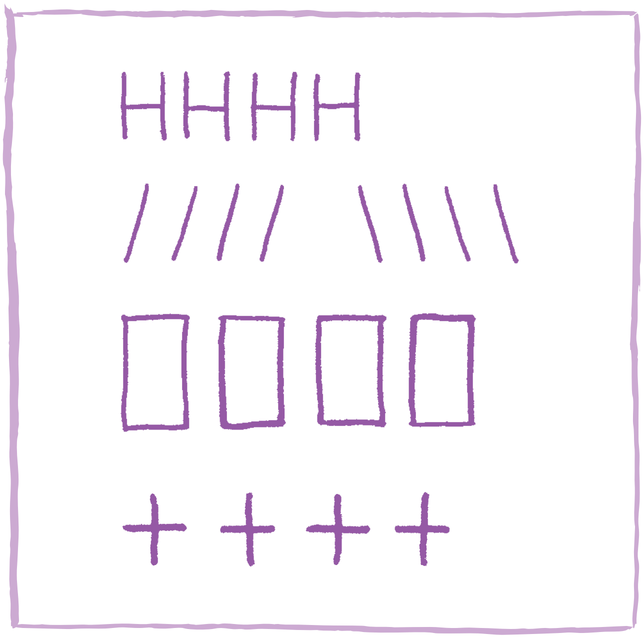
Top tips for getting started

1. Warm up your hand muscles with some exercises.
   See page 6.
2. Choose a time when you're not feeling rushed.
3. Don't worry about what to write – start with the doodles on the next page, copy a few lines from a book or write out some of the words or sentences from section 2.
4. Try out some pens – pick one that writes smoothly but doesn't smudge easily.

Doodles

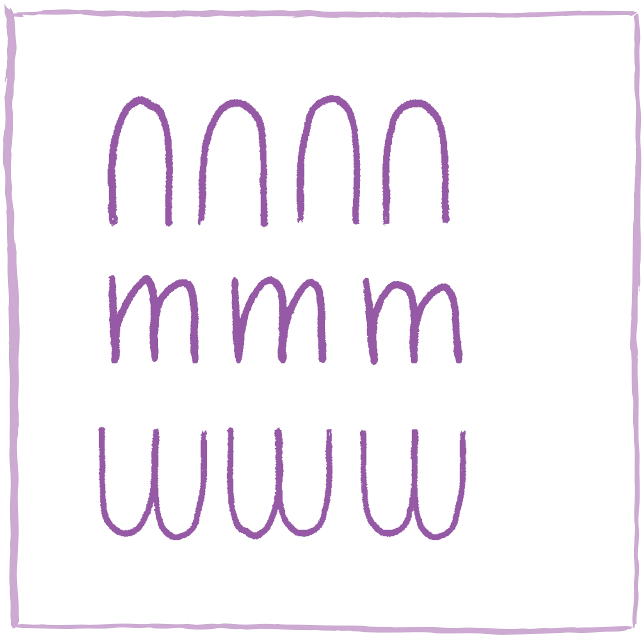
These shapes are found in all the letters of the alphabet.
Practising them will help your handwriting.

Lines



Practise here

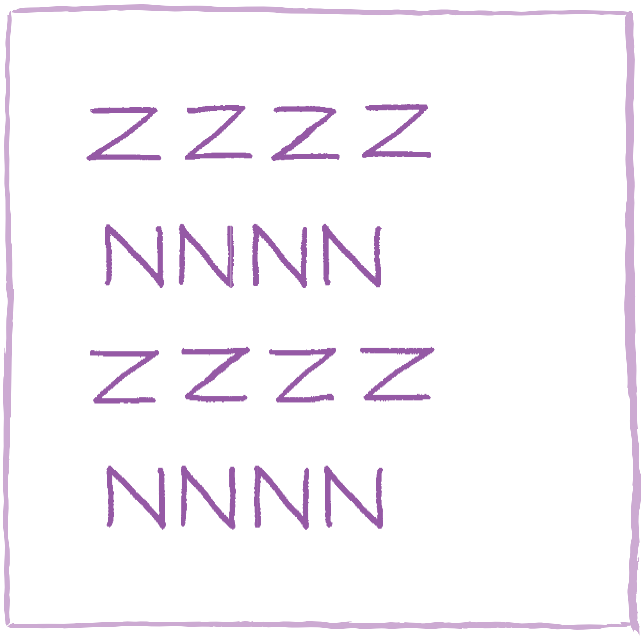
Waves and mounds



Practise here

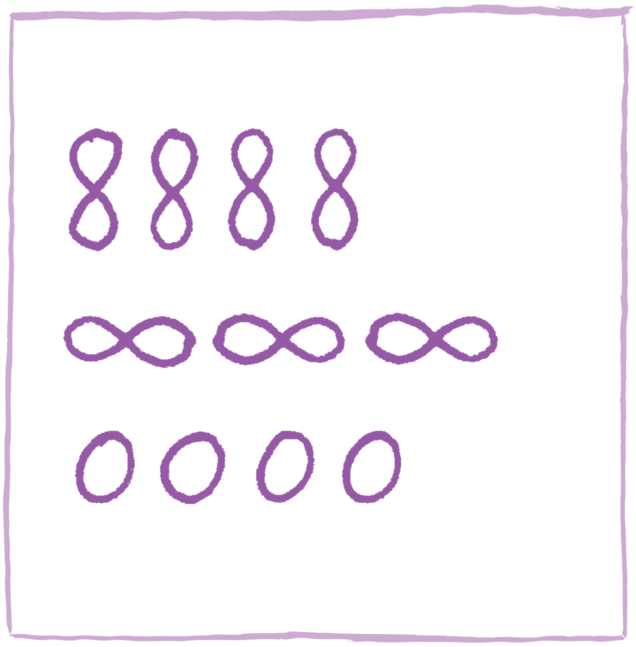
Doodles

Zig zags



Practise here

Curves



Practise here

Doodles

Practise these shapes.





Your style

Good handwriting is not a particular style of writing.
We all have our own individual style.

Here are some examples:

Best Wishes

Best wishes.

best wishes

Best Wishes

Best Wishes

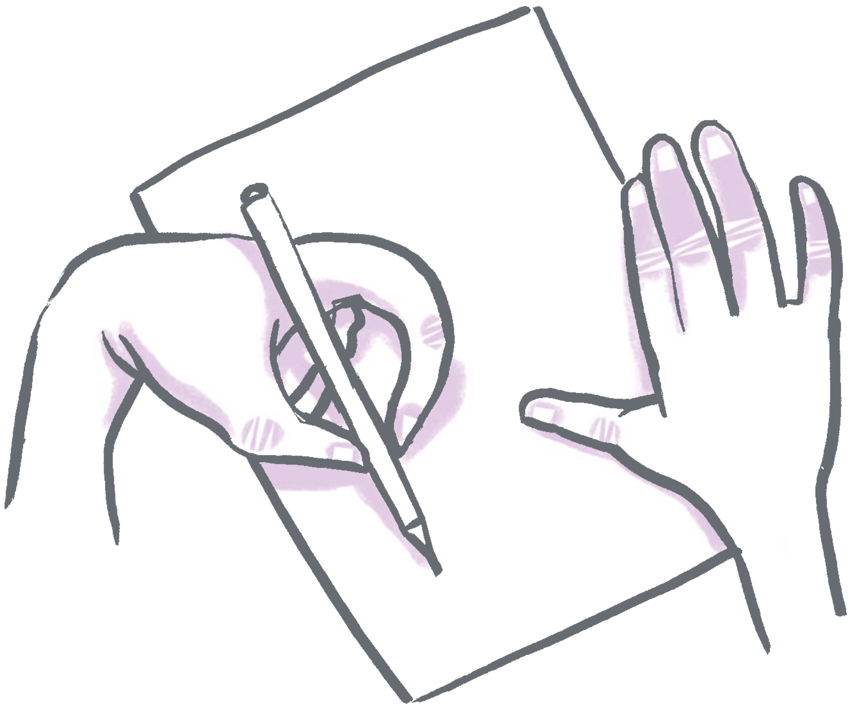
Best Wishes

Practise your style here.

Are you left-handed?

For every 100 people, about 7 write with their left hand.

If you write with your left hand, you can't see what you are writing.
Left-handers solve this problem in different ways.



Some people hold the pen or pencil higher up.

Are you left-handed?

Top 5 tips

1 People should write with their preferred writing hand.

2 Grip the pen higher up so that you can see your writing. Hold it at least 2cm (about 2 finger-tips) away from the tip of the pen.

3 Turn your page to the right.



4 Don’t use notebooks with a spiral binding.



5 Make sure there is plenty of room to your left to move your arm when writing.

Section 2

Practice makes perfect



Forming the letters

The alphabet has 26 lettters.

Capital letters

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Small letters

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Practise forming the letters here.

Forming the letters

Practise forming the letters. Write over the grey letter.
Then practise writing them by yourself.

Capital letters

A	A						
B	B						
C	C						
D	D						
E	E						
F	F						
G	G						
H	H						
I	I						
J	J						
K	K						
L	L						
M	M						
N	N						
O	O						
P	P						
Q	Q						
R	R						
S	S						
T	T						
U	U						
V	V						
W	W						
X	X						
Y	Y						
Z	Z						

Small letters

a	a						
b	b						
c	c						
d	d						
e	e						
f	f						
g	g						
h	h						
i	i						
j	j						
k	k						
l	l						
m	m						
n	n						
o	o						
p	p						
q	q						
r	r						
s	s						
t	t						
u	u						
v	v						
w	w						
x	x						
y	y						
z	z						

Forming the letters

The capital and small letters are beside each other.

Write over the grey letters. Then practise writing them by yourself.

A a	A a				
B b	B b				
C c	C c				
D d	D d				
E e	E e				
F f	F f				
G g	G g				
H h	H h				
I i	I i				
J j	J j				
K k	K k				
L l	L l				
M m	M m				
N n	N n				
O o	O o				
P p	P p				
Q q	Q q				
R r	R r				
S s	S s				
T t	T t				
U u	U u				
V v	V v				
W w	W w				
X x	X x				
Y y	Y y				
Z z	Z z				

A a	A a				
B b	B b				
C c	C c				
D d	D d				
E e	E e				
F f	F f				
G g	G g				
H h	H h				
I i	I i				
J j	J j				
K k	K k				
L l	L l				
M m	M m				
N n	N n				
O o	O o				
P p	P p				
Q q	Q q				
R r	R r				
S s	S s				
T t	T t				
U u	U u				
V v	V v				
W w	W w				
X x	X x				
Y y	Y y				
Z z	Z z				

Forming the letters

All CAPITAL letters should be the same height.

These letters are made with one stroke of the pen.
LVUWZCOS

These letters are made with two strokes of the pen.
BDJKMNPQRTXYG

These letters are made with three strokes of the pen.
AEFHI

LV VU WZ ZC OS
LV VU WZ ZC OS

BD JK MN PQR TX YG
BD JK MN PQR TX YG

AE FHI AE FHI AE FHI
AE FHI AE FHI AE FHI

Letter groups

Some letters are grouped together because they have a similar shape.

Try writing out these letters in groups.

TIP: Warm up by drawing the doodle shapes on page 13 and 14 first. They will help get your hand used to writing the shapes found in each group of letters.

b d h

m n r u

a c e o s

k t i l

j g p q f y

v w x z

The Dolch List

In 1948, Edward Dolch made a list of all the words that are used most often in everyday reading and writing. Here are the top 75 words from that list.

Write over each grey word and then write it again in the box.

a	a		come	come		other	other	
and	and		first	first		see	see	
he	he		her	her		then	then	
I	I		like	like		want	want	
in	in		more	more		when	when	
is	is		new	new		your	your	
it	it		only	only		been	been	
of	of		over	over		came	came	
that	that		their	their		do	do	
the	the		two	two		go	go	
to	to		were	were		into	into	
was	was		who	who		made	made	
all	all		an	an		must	must	
but	but		by	by		off	off	
his	his		could	could		our	our	
so	so		from	from		she	she	
are	are		here	here		there	there	
for	for		little	little		well	well	
not	not		me	me		where	where	
they	they		no	no		before	before	
as	as		or	or		can	can	
had	had		right	right		down	down	
on	on		them	them		has	has	
we	we		up	up		just	just	
at	at		what	what		make	make	

The Dolch List

Practise writing these words from the Dolch List.

First, write over the grey print, then try writing it by yourself.

have	have
before	before
right	right
could	could
made	made
into	into
other	other
much	much
down	down
first	first
little	little
that	that
look	look
out	out
only	only

Writing your name and address

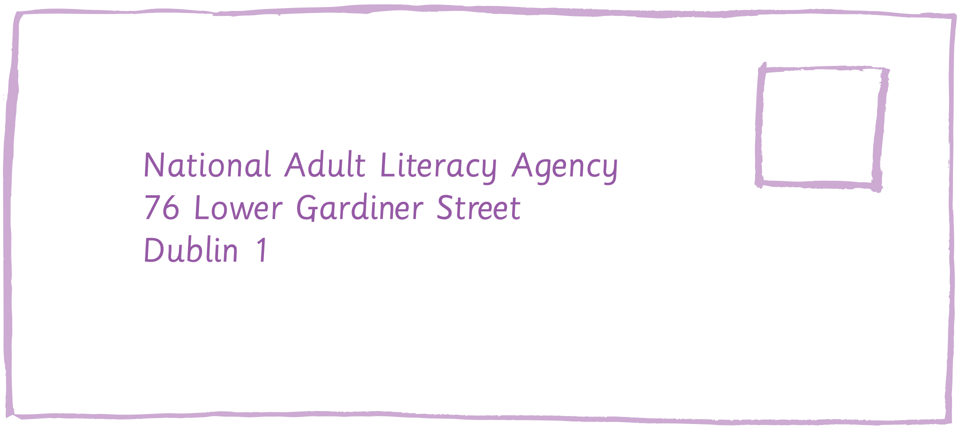
Writing your name or signature

Your signature is your name written in your own handwriting. Your signature should always be in your own unique style. Never use block capitals to write your signature.

Write your signature here:

Writing your address

Here is an example of an addressed envelope.
It is addressed to NALA.



Write your address on the envelope below.



Writing lists

Here is a list of items you might get from the supermarket.

Fill in the blank shopping list using items from the list and then add some of your own items.

Milk
Bread
Apples
Potatoes
Tomatoes
Butter
Sugar
Coffee
Tea
Eggs



Writing sentences

Now try to copy these sentences.

TIP: Remember to take a break if your hand starts to get tired.

She said she would call a taxi.

It is not cheap to get from there to here.

I must make a copy of that photo.

I was first to see them on the bus.

You must have been here before.

Can you ask her to call back later?

Where there is a will there is a way.

I would like to go home now.

Writing sentences

Finish these sentences.

TIP: Remember sentences start with a capital letter and end with a full stop.

I went to

I hope

I made

Some day

Now make up some sentences of your own.

TIP: You can use words from the Dolch list. See page 25

Writing a postcard

Write a short message on the left side of the postcard and write the address clearly on the right side.

Look at the example below .

Hi David,

Having a great time. The weather is lovely and sunny. We will be home on Sunday. See you then.

Love Laura

123 Main Street
Newtown
Co. Cork
Ireland

Write a message and address on the blank postcard.

Writing greeting cards

Greeting cards are one of the few things that are still written by hand.

The first card has a birthday greeting. Trace over it then write your own message on the other cards.

To Katie,

Happy Birthday.
Hope you have a
wonderful day.

Love David

Congratulations

Thank you

Good Luck

Pangrams

Pangrams are sentences that contain every letter of the alphabet at least once.

Practise them here.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

Heavy boxers perform quick waltzes and jigs.

Six juicy big steaks sizzled in a pan as five workmen left the quarry.

TIP: Remember to look up a dictionary or ask someone if you don't understand the meaning of a word.

Proverbs

Proverbs are well-known short sayings.

Write them out on the lines below.
Then write them into a lined copy or notepad.

It's never too late to learn.

The early bird catches the worm.

The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.

The longest journey begins with a single step.

Birds of a feather flock together.

An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well.

Writing numbers

The numbers below are printed in a standard style.

Practise writing the numbers here.
Write over the grey number first. Then write it again in the spaces underneath.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Now practise writing some numbers in words.
Write over the grey number and word. Then try writing them on your own.

1	1				one	one			
2	2				two	two			
3	3				three	three			
4	4				four	four			
5	5				five	five			
6	6				six	six			
7	7				seven	seven			
8	8				eight	eight			
9	9				nine	nine			
10	10				ten	ten			

Write your phone numbers here.

Home:

Mobile:

Writing dates

There are many different ways to write the date.

Here are some examples of the same date.

Write over the grey. Then write the date again in the space underneath.

14/2/09	14th Feb '09	14 – 2 – 2009
14/2/09	14th Feb '09	14 – 2 – 2009
14th February 2009	14 . 2 .09	February 14th, 2009.
14th February 2009	14 . 2 .09	February 14th, 2009.

Months of the year

Try writing the months of the year below. Then write the months in the correct place on the blank calendar. The first letter of each month is written in grey.

January	January	
February	February	
March	March	
April	April	
May	May	
June	June	
July	July	
August	August	
September	September	
October	October	
November	November	
December	December	

J	F	M
A	M	J
J	A	S
O	N	D

Write today's date here: ______________________________

Section 3

Quick fixes



What is good handwriting?

It doesn't matter what kind of handwriting style you have: spiky handwriting, curly handwriting, handwriting with loops, handwriting that slants to the left or right, small handwriting or large handwriting, **big bold** handwriting or delicate fancy handwriting.

Any style of handwriting is good, as long as the letters are clearly formed evenly spaced, on the line and easy to read.

Clearly formed letters + Letters placed on the line + Even spacing between the letters + Even spacing between the words = Good handwriting

Write out the following sentence two or three times.
It contains all the letters of the alphabet so it is a good sentence to use.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

What kind of style do you have?

What do you like about your handwriting?

Is there anything you would like to change about your handwriting?

The next few pages have some tips on how to fix common handwriting problems.

Improving your handwriting

Many people dislike their handwriting because they compare it with the style they were taught in school. In fact, all adults develop their own style of handwriting.

First look at what you **like** about your handwriting. Then decide if you need to change it in any way to make it easier to read.

Top 3 tips for improving your handwriting

1. Use the right tools –
   a good pen or pencil and lined paper.
2. Work on one problem at a time,
   don't try to fix everything at once.
3. Practise, practise, practise –
   the more you write the better you will get.

Lots of people have the same feelings about their writing.

Here are the most common handwriting problems.

1. Running out of steam
2. Problem letters
3. Spacing
4. Size of letters
5. Keeping it on the line
6. Making mistakes

The next few pages have examples of all these handwriting problems along with some tips and solutions.

Common handwriting problems and solutions

1. Running out of steam

Does your handwriting start off well and then get more untidy as you write, like this?



This is probably because your hand is getting tired or cramped.

Fix it

- Don't try to write too much at one time.
- Take plenty of breaks.
- Regular writing will help your hand become stronger, and with practise, you will be able to write for longer without tiring.
- Doing some of the hand exercises on page 6 will also help.

2. Problem letters

Some letters can cause confusion if they are not carefully formed.
For example this 't' looks like an 'r' and this 'a' could be a 'u'.



Check your handwriting for letters that might be unclear.

Fix it

- Take a look at the standard style of handwriting in the middle section of this magazine or look at other handwriting styles that you find easy to read. Try writing the letter in the new way – first by itself, and then in words.
- The more you practise, the easier it will get.

Common handwriting problems and solutions

3. Spacing

Getting the spacing right is an important part of handwriting. Some people have very small spaces between their letters like this:

small letter spacing

Other people have small spaces between their words like this:

smallwordspacing

This can make our handwriting harder to read. Look at what happens when better spacing is put between the words or letters on both these samples:

small letter spacing
better letter spacing
smallwordspacing
better word spacing

Fix it

If you think your writing is cramped, try stretching it out to see if it makes it easier to read. This will slow you down at first but with practise it will get easier. As a guide, spaces between words should be around the width of a pen. For spaces between letters, your letters should only 'touch' with hooks or tails, not with the actual letter shape.

goal goal

Common handwriting problems and solutions

4. Size of letters

Some people write all their letters the same size. If you would like to give your handwriting a more standard appearance, start each sentence with a large capital letter and end the sentence with a full stop.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

Don't worry if you mix joined letters with uppercase letters, lots of people do this!

ThE quick BROWN fox jumps OVER thE lazY DOg.

5. Keeping it on the line

Make sure your letters sit on the line.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

Remember: all letters should sit on the line except for these six letters.

g j p y q f

These letters are called 'descenders' because their tails 'descend' or go below the line.

Tall letters reach almost to the top of the line – there are six tall letters.

b d h t l k

Look at the sentence below and see how the letters are placed on the line. Write out the sentence and practise placing the letters correctly on the line below:

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

Staying on the line is much easier if you write slowly.

Common handwriting problems and solutions

6. Making mistakes

We all make mistakes! If you make a mistake when you're writing:

c→a

was

- Do use a corrector fluid if you have it handy. For example, Tippex.
- Do look at the shape of the letter and see if it can be changed easily. For example a 'c' can easily be changed into 'a' or 'd' or 'o'.
- Don't write over letters if they are a different shape for example: writing 'w' over 's'.

Fix it.

If you can't start again, put brackets around your mistake and draw a line through it. This is better than trying to write over a word (which usually makes it look worse). It also looks neater than scribbling the word out.

Mary,
Your mother rang this
(~~morming~~) morning at 10.
Ring her when you get back.
Liz

TIP: Practise what you want to write on a spare piece of paper. Write a few drafts until you are happy that you have no mistakes

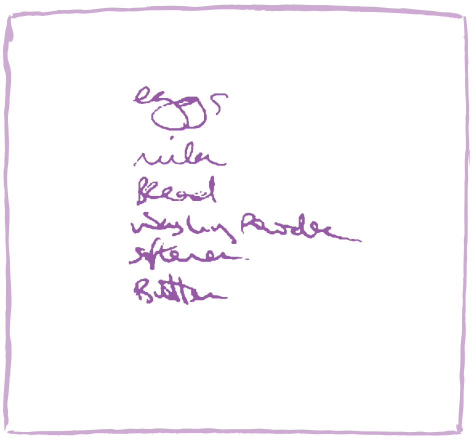
When to keep it neat

The neatness of your handwriting is important if someone is going to read it.

Here's Jennifer's shopping list.

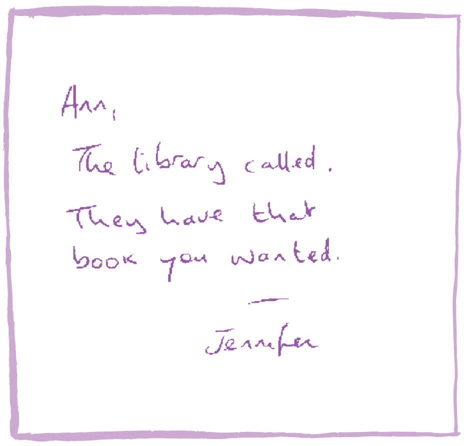
It's not very neat, but that's ok because Jennifer is the only person who is going to read it.

Write a note to yourself here in the second box.



Here's a note she wrote to her sister, Ann. She kept it as neat as she could so that it would be easy to read.

Write this note for someone else in the second box.



Filling out forms

Do you like filling out forms? Lots of people don't!

The most important thing when filling out a form is to write C L E A R L Y.

Forms often ask you to use BLOCK CAPITALS. This means using CAPITALS and not joining any letters.

If there are boxes on the form, put one letter or number in each box.

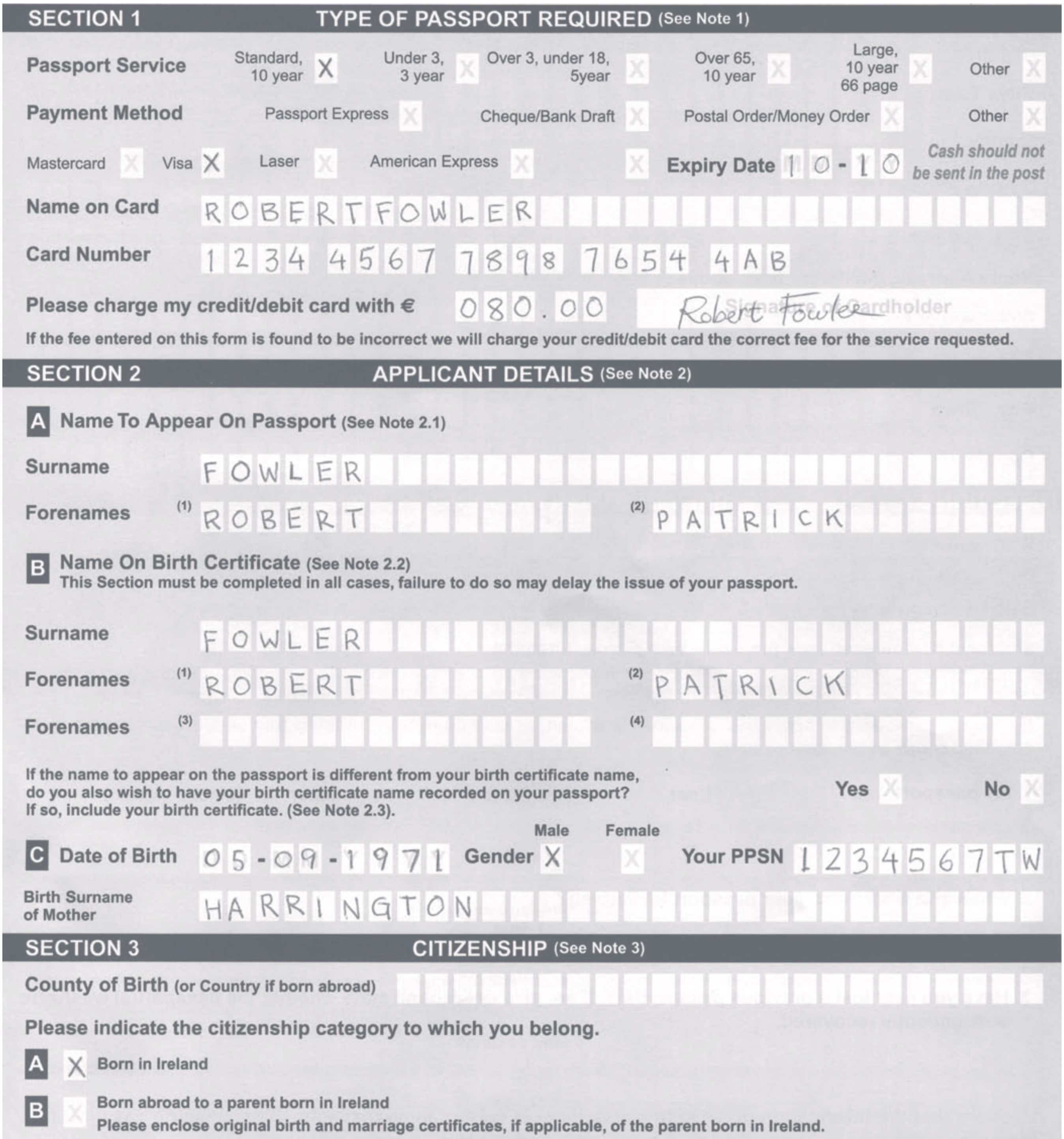
Top 5 tips for form filling:

1. Take two copies of the form, if you can. Use one to practise.
2. Always read the instructions before filling out a form.
3. Use a blue or black biro.
4. Write clearly and slowly.
5. Write your signature in your own handwriting style.

Filling out forms

Look at how this form has been filled out.

This form is used to get a new passport if your old one has been lost or stolen.



SECTION 1 — **TYPE OF PASSPORT REQUIRED** (See Note 1)

Passport Service — Standard, 10 year [X] | Under 3, 3 year [ ] | Over 3, under 18, 5year [ ] | Over 65, 10 year [ ] | Large, 10 year 66 page [ ] | Other [ ]

Payment Method — Passport Express [ ] | Cheque/Bank Draft [ ] | Postal Order/Money Order [ ] | Other [ ]

Mastercard [ ] | Visa [X] | Laser [ ] | American Express [ ] | [ ] | **Expiry Date** 1 0 - 1 0 | *Cash should not be sent in the post*

Name on Card ROBERTFOWLER

Card Number 1234 4567 7898 7654 4AB

Please charge my credit/debit card with € 080.00 — Signature of Cardholder: Robert Fowler

If the fee entered on this form is found to be incorrect we will charge your credit/debit card the correct fee for the service requested.

SECTION 2 — **APPLICANT DETAILS** (See Note 2)

A Name To Appear On Passport (See Note 2.1)

Surname FOWLER

Forenames (1) ROBERT (2) PATRICK

B Name On Birth Certificate (See Note 2.2)
This Section must be completed in all cases, failure to do so may delay the issue of your passport.

Surname FOWLER

Forenames (1) ROBERT (2) PATRICK

Forenames (3) (4)

If the name to appear on the passport is different from your birth certificate name, do you also wish to have your birth certificate name recorded on your passport? If so, include your birth certificate. (See Note 2.3). Yes [ ] No [ ]

C Date of Birth 05-09-1971 | Gender Male [X] Female [ ] | Your PPSN 1234567TW

Birth Surname of Mother HARRINGTON

SECTION 3 — **CITIZENSHIP** (See Note 3)

County of Birth (or Country if born abroad)

Please indicate the citizenship category to which you belong.

A [X] Born in Ireland

B [ ] Born abroad to a parent born in Ireland
Please enclose original birth and marriage certificates, if applicable, of the parent born in Ireland.

Filling out forms

Try filling out this form.

SECTION 1 — TYPE OF PASSPORT REQUIRED (See Note 1)

Passport Service — Standard, 10 year X — Under 3, 3 year X — Over 3, under 18, 5year X — Over 65, 10 year X — Large, 10 year 66 page X — Other X

Payment Method — Passport Express X — Cheque/Bank Draft X — Postal Order/Money Order X — Other X

Mastercard X — Visa X — Laser X — American Express X — X — **Expiry Date** M M - Y Y — *Cash should not be sent in the post*

Name on Card

Card Number

Please charge my credit/debit card with € . — Signature of Cardholder

If the fee entered on this form is found to be incorrect we will charge your credit/debit card the correct fee for the service requested.

SECTION 2 — APPLICANT DETAILS (See Note 2)

A **Name To Appear On Passport** (See Note 2.1)

Surname

Forenames (1) (2)

B **Name On Birth Certificate** (See Note 2.2)
This Section must be completed in all cases, failure to do so may delay the issue of your passport.

Surname

Forenames (1) (2)

Forenames (3) (4)

If the name to appear on the passport is different from your birth certificate name, do you also wish to have your birth certificate name recorded on your passport? If so, include your birth certificate. (See Note 2.3). — **Yes** X — **No** X

C **Date of Birth** D D - M M - Y Y Y Y — **Gender** Male X Female X — **Your PPSN**

Birth Surname of Mother

SECTION 3 — CITIZENSHIP (See Note 3)

County of Birth (or Country if born abroad)

Please indicate the citizenship category to which you belong.

A X Born in Ireland

B X Born abroad to a parent born in Ireland
Please enclose original birth and marriage certificates, if applicable, of the parent born in Ireland.

Details of Parent Born in Ireland

Birth Surname

Birth Forename — **Date of Birth** D D - M M - Y Y Y Y

County of Birth

C Naturalisation X — Foreign Birth Registration X — Post Nuptial X — Born abroad & adopted under Irish Law by an Irish citizen X

Enclose originals of all certificates

National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent, membership organisation, concerned with developing policy, advocacy, research and offering advisory services in adult literacy work in Ireland. NALA was established in 1980 and has campaigned since then for the recognition of, and response to, the adult literacy issue in Ireland.

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
Sandford Lodge
Sandford Close
Ranelagh
Dublin 6

Telephone: (01) 412 7900
Email: info@nala.ie
Website: www.nala.ie

Freephone support line: 1 800 20 20 65

eLearning website: www.learnwithnala.ie

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